APUNTES

Reflexiones teológicas desde el margen hispano

Year 13, No. 2, Summer, 1993

Año 13, No. 2, Verano, 1993

PRESENTACION

Los dos artículos principales en el presente número de *Apuntes*, aunque bien diferentes, tienen sin embargo algunos puntos en común. En ambos se trae a colación un teólogo de fuera de nuestro ambiente directo (Rahner en un caso, y Gutiérrez en el otro), y se intenta relacionar su contribución con ciertos elementos de nuestra experiencia como hispanos en los Estados Unidos (en un caso, con la experiencia general del pueblo latino como minoría étnica, y en el otro con la santería, fenómeno religioso tan común entre nuestro pueblo, pero tan poco estudiado o comprendido).

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Las dos reseñas han sido escritas, la primera, por la Dra. Peggy Ann Way, quien es Profesora de Teología Pasotral en el Seminario Teológico Eden; y, la segunda, por el Prof. Carmelo Alvarez, Secretario Ejecutivo de la Asociación Ecuménica de Teólogos del Tercer Mundo (EATWOT).

Apuntes (1SSN # 0279-9790) is published quarterly by the Mexican American Program, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX 75275. Second class postage paid at Dallas, TX 75260 and additional mailing offices. Subscription is $10.00 per year.

POSTMASTER, send address changes to: Apuntes, Mexican American Program, Perkins School of Theology, Southern University, Dallas, TX 75275.

Manuscripts are to be sent to our editorial offices: Apuntes, Justo L. González, Editor, 336 Columbia Dr., Decatur, GA 30030. **Materials sent in an IBM compatible system are much appreciated.**

Mailing and printing of **Apuntes** are provided by the United Methodist Publishing House.

A Rahnerian reading of Santería: A proposal for a Christian recovery of the syncretic elements of Latin American popular religiosity based on Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christianity"

Claudio M. Burgaleta, S.J.

Introduction

In a world increasingly aware of its religious pluralism, and just as sensitive to its history of religious intolerance and hegemony, the theoretical foundation out of which one engages in dialogue with another from a different tradition becomes a crucial consideration. Since Vatican II(1962-1965) the Roman Catholic church began to take seriously the task of Christian unity and of interreligious dialogue. A pioneer in this field was the German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner(1904-1984), and the theological construal blazing the trail of the early years of the interreligious dialogue was his concept of "Anonymous Christianity."

However, Rahner's concept has not received unanimous acceptance in the theological academy. "Anonymous Christianity" first came under attack by Hans Küng (Küng 1976:98) who considered the concept a "theological sleight of hand," that unrespectfully interpreted non-Christians in the light of Christianity's own interests. Küng protested that calling non-Christians "Anonymous Christians" was as presumptuous as non-Christians, say a Buddhist, calling Christians "Anonymous Buddhists."

Since that initial critique Rahner's thought on this matter has come under repeated attack for being insensitive to the uniqueness of other religions, for its presumptuousness of judging the validity of non-Christian religions by their similarity to Christianity actually serving as an impediment to authentic interreligious dialogue, and for its inadequacies in dealing with other theological and hermeneutical questions. The debate concerning Rahner's construal has involved such distinguished European Protestant and Catholic theologians such as Eberhard Jüngel and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Paul Knitter is a recent North American critic who finds Rahner an impediment to authentic dialogue with non-Christians (Knitter 1985:128-132).

Despite the critique that "Anonymous Christianity" has received, certain facets of Rahner's concept remain a useful tool for interpreting non-Christian religions. Rahner's insight that Christianity only becomes binding on non-Christians when it becomes an "effective reality" or is conveyed to non-Christians in a way which is convincing and believable to them given their respective "cultural spheres"(Rahner 1977:47-48) provides a new way to interpret the non-Christian elements which perdure in Latin American popular religiosity despite a half millenium of Christian evangelization.

This essay proposes Rahner's concept of "Anonymous Christianity" as part of the solution to the thorny dilemma of how to do justice to the syncretic elements of Latin American popular religiosity while remaining committed to the normativity and definitiveness of the Christ event. The argument presented is divided into three parts. The first section of this paper presents Rahner's concept of "Anonymous Christianity." The second concerns itself with a description and interpretation of *Santería* based on Robert J. Schreiter's model for interpreting syncretisms and Joseph M. Murphy's field work as a participant-observer of this religious expression in the Bronx, New York. The final section provides a Rahnerian reading of *Santería*, a type of popular religiosity common among Hispanics of the Caribbean, to demonstrate the efficacy of the "Anonymous Christianity" construal for a Christian recovery of the syncretic elements of Latin American popular religiosity.

Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity."

Underpinning Rahner's concern to find value in non-Christian religions, a *fides implicita*, is a biblical insight (1 Ti.2:4) which was taken up by the Second Vatican Council. Rahner is convinced of the Council's emphasis that God wills all humanity to be saved, and understands this omnipresent salvific will of God as God's self-bestowal in grace at all times communicated to humanity. The conditions of possibility for this omnipresent communication is what he refers to as the "supernatural existential." However, how he explicates the structure of this supernatural existential becomes the crucial foundation for affirming that in non-Christians there are religious values which must be recognized and respected.

Rahner underscores that the supernatural existential is a foundational reality for human beings in history. Part of humanity's socio-historical reality are structures manifested in the various and diverse religions of humankind.

> *In view of the social structure of man[sic] and the previously even more radical social solidarity of men, however, it is quite unthinkable that man, being what he is, could actually achieve this relationship to God---which he must have and which if he is to be saved, is and must be made possible for him by God---in an absolutely private interior reality and this outside of the actual religious bodies which offer themselves to him in the environment in which he lives. . .If however, man can always have a positive, saving relationship to God, and if he always had to have it, then he always had it within that religion which in practice was at his disposal by being a factor in his sphere of existence. (Rahner 1983:128)*

Thus, given the supernatural existential that gets worked out in history through diverse religions, Rahner asserts that:

> *[Non-Christian religion] also contains supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men[sic] as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason a non-Christian religion can be recognized as a* ***lawful*** *religion (although only in different degrees) without thereby denying the error and depravity contained in it. (Rahner 1983:121)*

Rahner's concept of the "lawful religion" is to be understood as a provisional and partial vehicle by which human beings who have not heard of Jesus Christ at all can come to salvation. Salvation is here understood as the best possible, though non-Christian, social embodiment of God's self-communication through the supernatural existential available to human beings at any particular point in history (Rahner 1983:125,128).

The theological justification for this understanding of the value of non-Christian religions as lawful religions has its foundation in the structure of the Old Testament. For Christians to recognize as valid the religious expression of Israel is also to recognize that in the composite that constituted Israelite religion there are elements of depravity and paganism (Rahner 1983:125-131). Therefore, if one recognizes in this religion, with its lights and shadows, a vehicle of God's presence and self-communication to humanity then one must also acknowledge the same possibility for other non-Christian religions (Rahner 1983:128).

Given Rahner's unpacking of the historical mediations of the supernatural existential in non-Christian religions it is not difficult to understand why he refers to the adherents of these religions as possessing a *fides implicita*, and thus meritorious of being considered "Anonymous Christians" (Rahner 1983:131). This *fides implicita* requires that the Christian missionary approach all potential converts as individuals already on the way to salvation.

However, Rahner is very clear in underscoring that the existence of grace and truth in non-Christian religions does not mean that there is no need for the church's kerygmatic activity among unbelievers. He maintains that anonymous Christians are in need of being evangelized for two reasons. The first is the incarnational and social structure of grace that is essential to Christianity, and secondly because, all things being equal, a person who grasps Christianity in a more reflexive way has a greater chance of salvation than one who merely does so unthematically (Rahner 1983:132). Indeed Rahner is quite insistent that the Christ-event eclipses the truth and value present in non-Christian religions:

> *It can and must be said that these non-Christian religions are in principle, and in themselves, overtaken and rendered obsolete by the coming of Christ and by his death and resurrection. This is because in fact all of them, even in those elements of truth and goodness which they possess, were only provisional manifestations, destined to be replaced, of that divine self-bestowal which is present in the innermost depths of the history of mankind[sic], and its religion, sustaining it, actively influencing the forms*

which it assumes, and finally coming to its full and definitive manifestation in Jesus Christ. (Rahner, 1977:47)

Given the categoricalness of Rahner's position regarding the Christ-event it would seem that he has painted himself into a corner where no dialogue is possible with non-Christian religions; regardless whether these religions had their genesis prior or subsequent to the Christ-event. After the Incarnation all historical manifestations of the *fides implicita* found in non-Christian religions pale by comparison to the Christ-event and Christianity. However, Rahner's thought is far too nuanced to permit such a facile and shallow dismissal of the faith lives of billions of people.

Rahner finds value in the *fides implicita* of non-Christian religions even after such a time when they have been exposed to the Gospel because he maintains that both believers and unbelievers are bound to believe in the Christ-event to the extent that the Gospel has been preached to them in a way that is truly believable to them. Until this occurs---and Rahner maintains that there is no way of judging this until the *parousia*---then non-Christians are bound in conscience to continue practicing those religions which make most real and accessible to them the gratuitous self-bestowal of God's communication as they understand it.

If we regard the history of salvation and revelation in the first place as being in some sense a **collective** *entity, then it can surely be said that this concrete 'movement' in time (naturally it may extend over a fairly long period of time) is arrived at that point at which Christianity in its explicit ecclesiastical form became an effective reality, making its impact and asserting its claim in history in the relevant cultural sphere to which the non-Christian religion concerned belonged. (Rahner 1977:47)*

For him[sic] the non-Christian religion which he has inherited from past history, and which has been handed down to him in his own sphere of life, is only abrogated as the authentic way of salvation for him at that point at which the message of Christ so penetrates into his own conscience as an individual that it is only a grave fault of his own that he can no longer reject it as the way of salvation offered by God and as the fulfillment that goes beyond anything that his former religion had to offer. (Rahner 1977:48)

But Rahner does not conclude his reflection on non-Christian religions by only positing an argument that saves their *fides implicita* in the face of nearly two thousand years of Christian missionary activity. He goes further and proposes that non-Christian religions do a great service to the church because by their existence they remind the church that God is greater than humankind and the church itself. This service of humility, as Rahner calls it, serves to remind the Christian

community of God's constant self-bestowal to all humanity through the supernatural existential despite the unsuccessful activity of the church (Rahner 1983:134).

Furthermore, the continuing presence of non-Christians in our world challenges the church not only to toleration and humility, but also to a renewed missionary thrust. However, this mission to yet again make Christ known to those who have not heard his name or have not found the church's proclamation of the kerygma believable is a two-edged sword that demands new efforts at missionary activity, but also indicts the church and calls it to reformation. This reformation involves recognizing in non-Christian religions truth, values and grace which the church has not managed to incarnate in her kerygmatic activity.

> *Christianity and the Church themselves are constantly in process of seeking the final perfection of their nature. And because of this they are in a position to recognize in those tendencies within the spiritual and religious history of mankind[sic] which are religiously positive even though not yet explicitly Christian, that which Christianity and the Church must absorb and transform in themselves in order to become fully that which they already are: the manifestation in history of the grace of God now at its eschatological stage in history and in a state of purity which is divinely attested and assured. (Rahner 1977:40)*

Santería: A Description and Interpretation

Santería, the way of the saints, derives its name from what at first glance appears to be its primary activity, i.e., the veneration of Catholic saints. In reality it is devotion to *orishas* or divine beings as understood by the Yoruba religion of Nigeria. *Santería* is a syncretism of two worlds, i.e., of the Yoruba religious imagination and Iberian popular Catholicism.

Robert J. Schreiter has developed a tripartite typology of syncretisms (Schreiter 1985:147-148). *Santería* and other forms of Afro-Brazilian popular religiosity are classified as the first type of syncretism where Christianity and another religious expression come in contact with each other to form another reality. The non-Christian religious tradition provides the basic framework for the new reality which emerges (Schreiter 1985:146).

The genesis of this syncretism was made possible by three factors: the malleability of the Yoruba religion, the social environment of the Spanish Caribbean in Colonial times, and the religious practices of Roman Catholicism during this same time (Murphy 1988:105). With the exception of Brazil, these three factors did not duplicate themselves anywhere else in the Americas.

The first factor which makes the *Santería* possible is the nature of the Yoruba religion. Its malleability and the facility with which it incorporated other religious systems is accounted for by the religion's long existence in pluralistic

urban contexts and its hierarchical structure. Murphy notes that by the time the slave trade to the Americas started the Yorubas had been living in cities for over a millennium. The Yoruba were also expert traders which put them in contact with cultures and religions which made them no strangers to pluralism (Murphy 1988:105).

Furthermore, the structure of the Yoruba religion was such that it allowed for the existence and incorporation of diverse divine powers into the religious universe of their high god, *Olodumare*, and it depended on the high priests or *babalawos* for its day to day functioning. Thus, Yoruba religion was able to survive its violent transfer to the New World and emerge as *Santería* in a culture dominated by Iberian Catholicism (Murphy 1988:105-106).

In addition to the fluid nature of Yoruba religion, the social conditions of the Colonial Spanish Caribbean contributed powerfully to the emergence of *Santería*. Large numbers of slaves from the same ethnic group were imported to work in the sugar plantations of the Caribbean throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, so that the population of Cuba is estimated to have been half African during the first two-thirds of the 19th Century. There also was a sizable concentration of former slaves in the cities due to the institution of *coartación*, the legal process by which a slave could purchase his or her freedom in a notarized procedure, sanctioned by the Spanish crown. Both of these factors were conditions of possibility which enabled *Santería* and its equivalents to flourish in the Spanish Caribbean and Brazil (Murphy 1988:107).

Ironically the third factor which contributed to the genesis of *Santería* were the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic church during the Colonial era. The church was able to secure for the slaves from the Spanish crown a number of privileges that prevented traditional African culture from being totally expunged from the Spanish Caribbean.

> *The civil and religious laws of Catholic Cuba guaranteed slaves rights of private property, inviolable marriage, and personal security. Though these rights were often ignored in practice, they could be better safeguarded in cities by the presence of civil and diocesan authorities charged with protecting them. First among these rights was that of coartación, by which a slave could legally purchase his or her freedom from a master for an agreed and published price. Though the slave owners in general resisted this practice, the substantial population of free people of color throughout Cuba's history indicated that* **coartados** *were not rare. (Murphy 1988:25-26)*

Another important privilege secured by the church was the right to have the respective ethnicities of the Africans recognized and sanctioned by the state. For the sake of its evangelization program the church actively promoted the gathering of slaves along ethnic lines, and fomented their culture in *cabildos* or mutual aid societies organized by the church for religious instruction. The

reasoning here was that it would be easier to evangelize peoples of the same language and culture than not. The church's strategy of organizing *cabildos* along the different ethnic groups represented among the Africans found in the Caribbean had the unexpected effect of putting it in a collision course with the colonial ruling elite since these *cabildos* dedicated a portion of their dues to the *coartación* of its slave members (Murphy 1988:29).

> *In Creole society, African society was taken as a matter of course. Slaves born in Africa were called* ***negros de nación***, *that is, of a distinct African "nation" or ethnic group. Fernando Ortiz[an expert in Afro-Cuban culture] listed over one hundred African ethnic groups known in Cuba. Though a much smaller number were able to preserve their ethnic identity as the nineteenth century continued, by the century's end some fourteen African naciones had preserved their ethnic sense of themselves in Havana social clubs. These clubs, called* ***cabildos***, *are the key to the survival of the Yoruba religion in Cuba. And it survived as a direct result of the policies of the Cuban Catholic church. Although the church probably did not intend to keep the* ***orishas*** *alive, it did so by recognizing the diversities of African ethnicity as much as those of Spain. (Murphy 1988:28)*

The other Catholic factors which contributed to the genesis of *Santería* were the lax initiation process demanded of the slaves by the priests who baptized them, and the popular Catholicism prevalent in the New World in the 16th Century. With rare exceptions and despite the church's promotion of the *cabildos*, religious instruction was not adequately provided to the Africans after their mass baptisms on the docks. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the catechesis which was provided, particularly at the sugar plantations, was less a form of handing down the faith and more of a vehicle of social control.

> *In the Latin New World, the Christianity preached to the slaves by white priests also emphasized heavenly bliss and earthly obedience. Antonio Nicolas, duke of Estrada and himself a priest, wrote a missional for Cuban slaves that likened the economy of salvation to the workings of a sugar mill --**La explicación de la doctrina cristiana acomodada a la capacidad de los negros bozales**. Here the daily round of mill life was presented as an allegory of the dramas of sin, judgment and salvation. The sugar mill was likened to purgatory, where the soul of the good slave was refined, like the sugar, from its impurities. The soul of the bad slave was like the burned sugar, lost forever, while the good soul went to heaven as the refined sugar went to the dryers. (Murphy 1988:118)*

The Iberian Catholicism which the slaves encountered in the Caribbean and on the South American continent was characterized by the centrality of the

cult of the saints. The role which mediation played in this form of Christianity made it very similar to the religious pantheon of the Yoruba with its multiplicity of *orishas*. Therefore, it did not take a great leap of the imagination for the poorly catechized and pastorally attended, newly baptized Africans to begin identifying their divinities with the saints of their masters (Murphy 1988:114).

While the factors which contributed to the genesis of *Santería* help explain how this syncretism came about and flourished in the Americas, they do not provide an explanation of the staying power of this form of Hispanic popular religiosity. Despite the end of slavery and the reforms ushered in by Vatican II, Medellín and Puebla, *Santería* manages to lay hold of the Caribbean popular religious imagination. Schreiter has suggested that the power syncretisms exercise in the lives of its adherents is explained by the fact that syncretisms are not ultimately about theology.

> *They [syncretisms] are about the entirety of the religious sign system. Thus resolving the fact that Saint George is equated with the Quechuan lightning deity will not be done by theological argument, but by looking at the entirety of the sign system---which social relations it maintains, what problems it solves, what benefits accrue from keeping things as they are. To conflate syncretism and theology is to reduce religion solely to a* ***view*** *of life, forgetting that it is also a* ***way*** *of life. (Schreiter 1985:157)*

Dissatisfied with the various models which have been used to understand the staying power of syncretisms, Schreiter has advanced his own model for understanding these religious expressions (Schreiter 1985:151-155). Schreiter's model is based on a semiotic description of culture, and views syncretisms from the point of view of the receiving culture and not from the point of view of the incoming church. Furthermore, it sees the syncretism as the product of the culture's attempts to incorporate new messages, codes and signs into the culture.

> *The range of syncretic possibilities, then, can be seen as four points on a spectrum, representing four incorporative responses to the new datum, Christianity. The responses are incorporative; that is, they are four ways in which the culture tries to incorporate the datum into its life, integrating it into the sign systems of the culture, so as to maintain the authority and credibility of its own culture. (Schreiter 1985:152)*

The first of the four points of incorporation on the spectrum of syncretistic possibilities involves playing upon the similarities between the sign systems of the culture and that of Christianity. The second point is filling gaps, i.e., the invading culture provides signs and often codes for dealing with a problem not adequately accounted for in the dominant sign system of the receiving culture.

The third form of incorporation is indiscriminate mixing, and occurs when

the receiving culture is at a low level of social and cultural organization, i.e., when the receiving culture finds itself under attack and the credibility of its sign system is being severely questioned. The fourth and last point of Schreiter's model is that of domination. Here the sign system of the receiving culture has been so debilitated that the sign system of the invading culture totally takes over, replacing the local sign system.

Santería and its equivalents in Brazil are identified by Schreiter as belonging to the first two points in his spectrum of syncretistic possibilities. They are seen not only as religious movements but also as expressions of cultural resistance (Schreiter 1985:154).

Interestingly enough, Murphy arrives at the same conclusion that Schreiter does with regards to interpreting *Santería* as a form of cultural resistance against the Spaniards' attempt to Christianize and deculturalize the Africans abducted and coerced into labor throughout the Americas. Following the ethnologist of Afro-American cultures, Melville Herskovits, Murphy concurs that *Santería* was the means used by the slaves and their descendants to preserve fragments of their cultural past called "Africanisms" (Murphy 1988:104,124-125).

Thus in Schreiter's model syncretism is understood as testimony of the receiving culture's resilience in maintaining its signs, codes and messages in the face of an alien and hostile symbol system. Murphy also concurs that syncretism, at least the case of *Santería*, was an adaptive move on the part of the receiving Yoruba culture faced with cultural change, and so it may be seen as a blow for its survival. It may be concluded then that syncretisms, in addition to being heterodox expressions of Christianity, are also part of the receiving and threatened culture's strategy to remain a viable player in a game of cultural change and survival. A game where the brutal outcome of genocide was an all too real possibility.

A Rahnerian Reading of Santería

If one accepts Schreiter and Murphy's interpretation of *Santería* as more than just a heterodox expression of Christianity, but rather an expression of the resistance to genocide on the part of an African people of the Americas, then a case may be made, using Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity" construal, which highlights the values of *Santería* for the Christian community. *Santería* ceases to be merely a syncretistic expression of Christianity which needs to be expunged through renewed evangelization efforts, but rather becomes what Rahner calls a "lawful religion" (Rahner 1983:121). That is, a provisional and partial vehicle by which human beings who have not heard of Jesus Christ at all, or not in a convincing way, can come to of salvation.

The provisional nature and limitedness which Rahner ascribes to lawful religions should in no way be understood as portraying these religions as playing an inconsequential role in the process of salvation for those who adhere to them,

i.e., as offering a second-class or partial salvation. On the contrary, these non-Christian religions not only play an indispensable part in the salvation of those who have not heard of Christ at all nor in a credible fashion, but also these non-Christian religions do a great service to the identity of the Christian church.

Rahner sees this as the case because he is committed in a normative and definitive manner to God's salvific will for humanity (Rahner 1983:128). It is this assumption that enables him to tease out from his understanding of the social and historical manifestations of the supernatural existential a view of non-Christian religions which respects them. He sees them holding out to large groups of humanity a salvation which Christianity has either been unable to proclaim or has done so in an unconvincing way (Rahner 1977:48). But in addition it demands of him that the values found in them be taken seriously by Christianity precisely because they mirror those values which Christianity holds dear (Rahner 1977:40).

Furthermore, Rahner posits that non-Christian religions serve as a reminder to the Christian community that it has failed in its mission to proclaim the Gospel in a believable way to the peoples of a given culture, and thus calls the Christian community to humility and reformation (Rahner 1977: 47-48). That is, a picture of non-Christian religion emerges in Rahner's theology which no longer functions as a problem to be explained away, but rather as a harbinger of both what the church should be were it to be a better evangelizer, and as a testimonial to the omnipresent and inexhaustible love that God has for humanity.

These non-Christian religions are the porters of a value which the church does not possess, and which the church must incorporate if it is to be truly Christ's church. The non-Christian religions become teachers of the Christian churches in the pedagogy of inculturating Christian values in a fashion that makes them believable to the peoples of cultures which are not Christian.

Thus in the case of *Santería*, it may be argued that this syncretic form of Christianity provides an access to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* that is both credible to people of Afro-Caribbean extraction and has kept and continues to keep the cultural universe of these people from completely disappearing in the Americas. This is the case because non-Christian religions are now seen as the guardian, for people of non-Western cultures, of those values which Christianity might have otherwise demolished or neglected. In the case of *Santería* these would be the "africanisms" to which Murphy referred (Murphy 1988:104).

The continued existence of *Santería* offers Christianity a most valuable and needed treasure. *Santería* serves as a treasure-house of African culture, and as a door through which the Christian community can enter and try again to communicate the Christ event to peoples of African descent in a fashion which does not repeat the errors of the first evangelization, i.e., genocide and an uninculturated proclamation of the kerygma. The existence of *Santería* comes to be the condition of possibility for a new evangelization of Afro-Caribbean people because it has served and serves as the vehicle through which their culture escaped annihilation. Therefore, *Santería* functions as the only existent cultural

manifestation which can serve as a foundation from which an inculturated project of Christian evangelization may be developed for people of Afro-Caribbean descent.

Conclusion

This essay has proposed Karl Rahner's "Anonymous Christianity" construal as a useful theory for a Christian recovery of the syncretistic elements of Hispanic popular religiosity. A Rahnerian reading of a syncretistic manifestation of popular religiosity like *Santería* yields a respectful interpretation of this depository of Afro-Caribbean culture. Furthermore, a Rahnerian interpretation of *Santería* sounds a call for reformation to the Christian community in that it underscores the less than convincing proclamations of the Gospel to the African and Native American peoples of the Americas.

At a time when the Roman Catholic communion on both continents of the New World prepares to implement Pope John Paul II's call for a "new evangelization," it seems paramount that any new inculturated project of proclaiming the kerygma be most lucid about the reasons for the limitations of the first evangelization. Often in the past these non-Western religious expressions were dismissed as corruptions of the true faith, and expunged with unparalleled cruelty and vehemence. The resistance to genocide contained in popular religious expressions, such as *Santería*, need to be interpreted anew as valiant attempts by non-Western peoples not to be party to their own genocide by denying their culture as a condition of embracing the "Good News."

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Resumen

En el presente artículo se explora una posible interpretación de la santería siguiendo el modelo de Karl Rahner de ver un «cristianismo anónimo» en la fe de muchos que no confiesan a Jesucristo. Al mismo tiempo que se tienen en cuenta las objeciones que se han hecho a esta postura de Rahner, se trata de mostrar que tal postura puede ayudamos a comprender y a valorar la santería.

En esa voloración, se emplea también la tipología de Robert Schreiter en cuanto a los diversos modos de sincretismo, y se intenta por tanto ver la santería, no como mera superstición, sino como uno de los modos en que la cultura africana mantuvo sus señales, códigos y mensajes --en otras palabras, su naturaleza esencial-- en medio de las difíciles circunstancias de la América española. Así vista, la santería es un testimonio más del modo en que los pueblos colonizados y oprimidos responden a los intentos de suprimir su cultura, frecuentemente en nombre del cristianismo.

Gustavo Gutiérrez' Liberation Theology: Toward a Hispanic Epistemology and Theology of the Suffering of the Poor

Juan G. Feliciano

> *It must be noted that from a Latin American perspective, our question is not how to do theology after Auschwitz? Because in this continent we continue living, daily, the violation of human rights, the assassination, the torture that we rejected in the Jewish holocaust forty years ago. Therefore, for us is a matter of finding a language about GOD in the midst of the hunger of millions of human beings, the humiliation of races considered inferior, the discrimination against women specially of the poor sectors, the social injustice made systematic, the persistent and high infant mortality, the desaparecidos (the "disappeared ones"), those that are unjustly jailed and restricted of their liberty, the suffering of the people that struggle for their right to a life, the exiled and refugees, the terrorism of diverse signs, the common burial grounds full of death bodies from Ayacucho. [...}How to talk about the GOD of life when the innocent are killed massively and cruelly? How to proclaim the love of GOD in the midst of such a disdain for human life? How to proclaim the resurrection of the LORD where death rules, particularly over the children, women, poor, and indigenous, the "insignificant" of our society?.*[1]

Introduction

Suffering is the result of different kinds of oppression inflicted upon people. Poverty, racism, classism, imperialism, hierarchical structures, sexism, physical abuse, institutional violence, domestic violence, exploitation, are all kinds of oppression. Being poor, i.e., living in inadequate conditions, lacking resources to meet basic human and social needs, and the resulting suffering, is the outcome of some of those kinds of oppression. How to talk about GOD in the midst of such *reality* is the question raised by Gutiérrez.[2]

The basic Liberation paradigm examines this problem of talking about God in the midst of poverty, oppression, and destruction of the poor. Especially, Latin American and Hispanic Liberation Theology examines this mystery because

1.Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios desde el Sufrimiento del Inocente: Una Reflexión sobre el Libro de Job*, Segunda Edición, Ediciones Sígueme, Salamanca, 1988, pp. 184.

2.Specially in *How to Talk About God?* I have used the original text in Spanish: *Hablar de Dios desde el Sufrimiento del Inocente.*

oppression and poverty are central to our existence as *Latino-Americanos* and as Hispanic-Americans.[3]

If we want to address the question of "talking about GOD," we need to consider also the epistemology about GOD. We talk about what we know, and vice versa.[4] Therefore, if we want to address the question of "talking about God," we also need to address the question of "knowing about God." Gutiérrez faced this conflict when he challenged the proposition of Thomas Aquinas: "De Deo scire non possumus quid sit, sed quid non sit."[5] Such proposition would render theology an impossible task. For Gutiérrez, this is the challenge posed by the mystery of GOD. The theological task becomes then an effort to *think* about the mystery.[6]

In our[7] search for plausible answers to this epistemological question, this paper is a study of suffering from a liberation point of view. For this purpose we will employ Gutiérrez' liberation theology, other Hispanic-American theologians,[8] and other sources.

How to talk about God

How to talk about GOD in the midst of oppression is the question raised by Gustavo Gutiérrez' Liberation Theology. That is the thrust of his theology as an indication for liberation.

3.The distinction has to be made due to the number of Latinos living (and dying) in the USA and the socio-cultural differences with those living (and dying) in Latin America. Economic, cultural, social, religious, and language differences are important factors in the consideration of the ethos. It is important to note the poverty conditions of most Latino/Hispanics; both in our *América*, and in the USA.

4."For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." MT. 12:34b, NRSV.

5."de Dios no podemos saber lo que es, sino sólo lo que no es." "about God we can not know what he is, only what he is not." Summa Theologica, 1,9.3 introd. as cited by Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios...*, p. 13.

6.Gutierrez, *Hablar de Dios...*, p. 13.

7.When I speak in plural, it is not to avoid my responsibility with what I write; it is because to be a Hispanic-American is to be in community with my family, my culture, my people. I refuse to renounce to my identity as a Hispanic-American an be forced to speak individualistically. Furthermore, I do not pretend to own these ideas, nor ask for a "copyright" on them. These ideas are the product of conversations, dialogues, and community. I am not their proprietor, although I make myself responsible for the consequences of each one of them.

8.For example, the works of David Abalos, *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political*, Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986; Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1990; J. González & C. González:*Liberation Preaching*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1980; A. Isasi-Díaz & Y. Tarango: *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1988; Virgil Elizondo, "Toward an American-Hispanic Theology of Liberation in the USA," in V. Fabella & S. Torres, (editors), *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology*, Orbis Books, NY, 1983.

How to talk about a God who reveals himself as love within a reality marked by poverty and oppression? How to announce the God of life to people who suffer an unjust and premature death? How to recognize his gift of graceful love and of his justice in the suffering of the innocent? With what language could we tell those who are not even considered persons that they are sons and daughters of God?[9]

For Gutiérrez, all liberation theology stems from efforts to give sense to human suffering and to struggle for its liberation. Citing Desmond Tutu, he affirms that liberation theology seeks to decipher human suffering when those suffering are victims of organized oppression and exploitation, when they are mutilated and treated as inferior beings than, what they really are: human beings, created at the image of God, redeemed by one Savior and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.[10]

In Latin America, according to Gutiérrez, the problem of theology is not how to announce God to the unbelievers (as seems to be the case from a North Atlantic perspective illustrated by Bonhoeffer's quote: "How to announce a God to a world that has become adult ['mundig']?"). In Latin America the challenge does not come from the unbeliever but to the non-person. Those are people who have not been recognized as persons by the existing social order. The non-persons are the poor, the exploited, those that have been systematically and legally deprived of their human quality, which does not even know they are human beings.

In the midst of this reality, the theological predicament becomes, not how to announce God to an adult world, but how to announce God as a Father to an "un-human" world?[11] As a result, liberation theology has to address the problem of how to tell the suffering in Latin American that they are sons and daughters of God.

For Gutiérrez, all theology is a word about God, about the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The task of the theologians is, then, to think and talk about that mystery. The mystery must be communicated and proclaimed because it means life for every person.

In searching for ways to talk about God, Gutiérrez affirms the two phases of liberation theology's methodology. The "first act (or moment)" in theologizing comes with human contemplation and commitment to God's will. Only then, can the human being, in a "second act," reflect about God. These are the two eminent

9 *Hablar de Dios...* pp. 18-19.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

11. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La Verdad los Hara Libres: Confrontaciones*, Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones (CEP), Lima, 1986, p. 17.

phases of liberation theology: praxis and reflection, later identified with orthopraxis and orthodoxy.[12]

One of the principal contributions of Gutiérrez, and liberation of theology, to the task of theology is the affirmation of this methodology. To find a way to talk about God in the midst of suffering, Christian theology has to begin from a reverence to God and a dedication to following God's will for humanity. "Only following the praxis of contemplation and commitment is it possible to elaborate an authentic and respectful discourse about God."[13]

The mystery of God is revealed in prayer and solidarity with the suffering poor. That is what Gutiérrez calls "the first act," the christian life. Only later, could that life inspire a reflection, a rationale. That is what Gutiérrez calls "the second act." The first act is a moment of silence before God. The theological discourse, on the other hand, denotes talking about God. "One is a theologian insofar as one is linked to the life and commitments of a Christian community. Only within such a community does one have a theological function to carry out; that function is an ecclesial task."[14]

This process is known as the hermeneutical circle. According to Gutiérrez, its foundation is Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God. For liberation theology in Latin America, it is important to maintain that Christ is the Word (Logos, *Verbo*) of God. Christ is the core of all theology, of all talking about God. Otto Maduro affirms this when he writes:

> *If theology is "a second moment"--emerging from and vying to respond to the concrete challenges that believers experience in their real lives in community--the understanding of the "previous moment" or the "first moment" as the pre-text and the context of theology is, therefore, critical for the task of theology.*[15]

Finally, let me paraphrase Gutiérrez in his delineation of his theology. He writes that theology, as a critical reflection based upon the illumination of the Word appropriated by faith about the presence of Christians in the world, should help us to see how is the relation established between a faith-life and the demands

12.*(Teología de la Liberación) A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis Books, NY, 1988 (I have used the Spanish revised and corrected 7th edition published by CEP, 1990. My quotes are from that edition). Specially interesting and informing is the new introduction Gutiérrez wrote to this book in 1990. The original text was published in 1971. In writing about the hermeneutical circle of faith-praxis-reflection, Gutiérrez asserts that orthopraxis and orthodoxy are mutually required, p.39.

13.*La Verdad...* p. 12.

14.Gutierrez, *"Reflections from a Latin American Perspective: Finding Our Way to Talk about God"*, p. 224.

15.Otto Maduro, "Liberation Theology" in Musser and Price *A New Handbook of Christian Theology*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1992, pp. 287-293.

for the construction of a just and human society (liberation). Liberation theology arises from a confrontation between the urgency of announcing the life of the Risen One and the deadly conditions that the poor of Latin America are suffering.[16]

Job, Suffering, and Epistemology

> *One day the divine beings presented themselves before the LORD, and the Adversary (heb. "ha-satan") came along with them. The LORD said to the Adversary, "Where have you been?" The Adversary answered the LORD, "I have been roaming all over the earth". The LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you noticed My servant Job? **There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil!**" The Adversary answered the LORD, "Does Job not have good reason to fear God? Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has. You have blessed his efforts so that his possessions spread out in the land. But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face". The LORD replied to the Adversary, "See, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on him". The Adversary departed from the presence of the LORD.*[17]

In one of his most important contributions, Gutiérrez wrote in 1986 a book about the suffering of the innocent. This book was the outcome of a series of conferences and theological reflections. It is an exceptional reflection on the poetic Book of Job. Gutiérrez's reflections on this book are concurrent with the liberation theology affirmation of God's preferential option for the poor and the suffering, the innocent.

Job is a classic example of the suffering of the faithful in the Scriptures. The fundamental question posed by the epilogue of the Book of Job is not, Does the innocent suffer? The fundamental question is: What should innocents do when inexplicable suffering comes upon them? The portraiture of Job contains the answer: in mourning for his loss Job blesses the Lord who gave and who has taken away, never sinning in his speech or speaking irreverently of God (Job 1:21-22, 2:10).

The innocent suffering is illustrated when Job suffers the divine theft of his children, his property and his reputation. The remarkable lesson of Job is that during his suffering he can still, with piety, assert that it is with God and no other that he must treat, and he can demand that from God and no other his innocence

16. *Teología de la Liberacion*, p. 40. This note was taken from new introduction (1990) Gutierrez wrote for the book he first published in 1971.

17. Job 1:6-12, TANAKH, The New JPS Translation, 1985.

be vindicated, since not even his own complete assurance of his innocence can satisfy him.[18]

There is an apparent contradiction between Job's faithfulness and piety (as recognized by God in Job 1:8, i.e., before Job's penury and suffering) and his identification as a model (or example) for the suffering of the poor and the "true religion" by Gutiérrez. In the study of suffering from a liberation point of view, this contradiction calls us to recognize and consider its epistemological implications. If we follow Gutiérrez' proposition, we must reformulate the question in this way: How can the oppressed call Job an archetype of the poor and "true believers" (the suffering) when GOD called Job "blameless and upright" when he was affluent?[19]

One option we have is in attempting to appreciate it in its theological dialectic. When seeking to understand social realities (praxis[20]) and develop faith interpretations (theology), one has to consider basic questions about knowing (epistemology). Not because knowing comes before praxis, but, on the contrary, because praxis and knowing are intimatelly related. After all, this is Gutiérrez' definition of theology.[21]

There are five ways of explaining knowledge that have been proposed as epistemological models.[22] These are:

1. The primacy of theory (orthodox model). This model sustains that the ontological structure of reality, or being, is independent from --and unchanged by-- praxis. The believers are objects of a systematic understanding of faith, a dogma. This is applied with hierarchical authority.

2. The primacy of praxis. This model insists that theory is an external reflection on praxis. The emotive-intuitive experience of believers is the base for understanding, not theoretical constructs.

3. The primacy of faith-love. This model criticizes the first model for its conceptualism and the second model for its tendency to subordinate faith to politics and modern culture (secular humanism). For this model, "the revealed

18.See David J.A. Clines, "A Brief Explanation of Job 1-3" in Roy B. Zuck, editor: *Sitting with Job: Selected Studies on the Book of Job*, Baker Book House, Michigan, 1992, pp. 250-251.

19.Its seems like we need to ask the opposite question asked by "ha-satan": "Does Job not have good reason to fear God? Why, it is You who have fenced him round, him and his household and all that he has. You have blessed his efforts so that his possessions spread out in the land. But lay Your hand upon all that he has and he will surely blaspheme You to Your face." (Job 1:9)

20."Praxis" is used here as interpersonal relationships (subject to subject) and distinct from "poiesis" (subject to object) relationships.

21.Chapter 1 of Gutierrez' *Theology of Liberation* is dedicated to define theology as a critical reflection upon a praxis: faith.

22.As summarized by Roberto Goizueta, "Introduction: Theory and Praxis", a course offered through the Fund for Theological Education Hispanic Summer Program at the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California, 1992.

Word of God is the *only* source of truth or knowledge." There is a paradox between Christian faith-love *vis a vis* theory-praxis.

4. Critical Theoretic Correlations. In trying to bring the previous three models together, this model insists there is a critical theoretic correlation between Christian tradition and the demands of theory and praxis. The intention of this model, as theoretic, remains more expositive than transformative.

5. Critical Praxis Correlations. This model seeks a critical union between the categories of theory-praxis and Christianity, but locates this critical correlation in praxis rather than in theory. "Praxis itself as action or performance grounds the activity of theorizing. Praxis is not only the goal but also the foundation of theory."[23]

The difference of this model with the second model is that this model acknowledges the impossibility of finding a praxis that itself is pure or innocent. The praxis of the modern world has brought us too many victims whose cries unmask its pretended innocence. Reason, therefore, cannot only be disclosive but also transformative. Liberation theology (Gutiérrez) would argue that it is through our liberative transformation of society and ourselves that the truth is disclosed to us. It is this truth that, in turn, is itself liberating and urges us to transformative praxis.

Therefore, the praxis of suffering of Job is the qualifying reason to impersonate him as an example (model, archetype[24]) for the innocent who suffer in our communities. It is then the only way to know and talk about GOD:

> *Because in this continent (Latin America) we continue living, daily, the violation of human rights, the assassination, the torture that we rejected in the Jewish holocaust forty years ago. Therefore, for us it is a matter of finding a language about GOD in the midst of the hunger of millions of human beings, the humiliation of races considered inferior, the discrimination against women specially of the poor sectors, the social injustice made systematic, the persistent and high infant mortality, the* ***desaparecidos*** *(the "disappeared ones"), those that are unjustly jailed and restricted of their liberty, the suffering of the people that struggle for their right to a life, the exiled and refugees, the terrorism of diverse signs, the common burial grounds full of death bodies from Ayacucho. [...}* ***How to talk about the GOD of life when innocent are killed massively and cruelly?*** *How to proclaim the love of GOD in the midst of such a disdain for human life? How to proclaim the resurrection of the LORD where death rules,*

23.*Ibid*.

24.Gutierrez asserts that the "fathers of the Church" introduced Job as one of the great figures of Christ in the Old Testament, *Hablar de Dios...*, p. 23.

particularly over the children, women, poor, and indigenous, the "insignificant" of our society? {...} Job signals a path through his vehement protest, his discovery of the concrete commitment with the poor and with all of those that suffer unjustly, his encounter with GOD, and through his recognition of the gratuity of GOD's project over human history.[25]

Hispanic-Americans, and other people in the USA, struggle to survive in the midst of different types of oppression. Our communities are crying out for liberation. There is a search for a common identity and an appraisal of our cultures. We reject isolation and segregation and are building bridges among our cultures. We are recovering our bonds with native lands, communities, and families. There is an awakening of popular religiosity. There is also a rejection of the dominant culture as Hispanic Americans seek to affirm our own authentic and original cultures.

In this context we are challenged to embrace a transformative praxis.[26] A praxis that transforms us in a dialectic relationship between identity and community. Only then, can Job, epistemologically, be recovered as a paradigm of the innocent, the suffering, the poor.

Conclusion: The Exemplary Motif

For Gutiérrez, the praxis of suffering, shared by the poor of the world, becomes then, with Job, the catalyst element for knowing and talking about GOD. In this sense, Job can be classified as an example for all of those who suffer different kinds of oppression. This is an "exemplary motif."

The Scriptures contain many central motifs, topics, issues, and values. These are integrated into cognitive-developmental systems (history, passion) that give meaning to the existence, struggles, relationships, and community of the people of GOD.[27] The possibility of considering Scriptures with a literary perspective, as this one, allows the disciple to integrate and realize the similarities and differences of the Biblical history with his/her community stories.

The exemplary motif is an aid for knowing and talking about GOD. It is significant, both for the individual and the community of relationships. The "Gestalt" theory of learning argues that for a person to understand, grasp, realize, acquire, i.e., to learn a concept (cognitive structures), that person must initiate a thinking process. This process symbolizes a re-organization, a re-structuring of the cognitive structures that are already integrated in that person's mind. This is what Fishbane is saying when he asserts that:

25.Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios...*, p. 184.

26.David Abalos, *Latinos in the United States: The Sacred and the Political*, Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986.

27.See specially Fishbane's *Text and Texture* for a description of some of these motifs.

by tracing the recurrent recomposition of Eden-imagery around core moments in biblical history, a unique dimension of that history is brought into view. For just as these imagistic representation of natural harmony provide symbolic vectors to those transnatural intuitions which preceded them, so will attentiveness to the historical oscillations of Eden-imagery disclose the coordinates of a deep and persistent religious reality in the Bible...the exegetical alignment of Eden-imagery in diverse biblical texts manifests a latent form of intertextual coherence which, reciprocally, transfigures our very understanding of the Bible-as-a-whole.[28]

Accordingly, the conceptualization and comprehension of motifs within the biblical text as a "dialectical response and responsibility" between GOD and humankind is critical to the understanding, i.e., knowing and talking about GOD.[29] This is an epistemology of praxis as a dialectical relationship between writer and readers.

The author, or authors, of Job facilitated this dialectical relationship by initiating the dialogue with the exemplary motif: "The LORD said to the Adversary, "Have you noticed My servant Job? **There is no one like him on earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil!**" (Job 1:8). Later in the story we learn why Job was called blameless and upright:

For I [Job] saved the poor man who cried out,
The orphan who had none to help him.
I received the blessing of the lost;
I gladdened the heart of the widow.
I clothed myself in righteousness and it robed me;
Justice was my cloak and turban.
I was eyes to the blind
And feet to the lame.
I was a father to the needy,
And I looked into the case of the stranger.
I broke the jaws of the wrongdoer,
And I wrested prey from his teeth.[30]

We are called to be examples *to and in* the community. We are called to be examples not on how to live the new life, but on its possibility and on how to pursue it. That is why, I believe, an experience with the Christ is essential for a

28.Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p.111

29.Maybe this is the best definition of "conversion" because it is a transformative relationship with the Creator. The transformation transpires in the human being, but it affects all his/her relationships.

30.Job 29:12-17, TANAKH, New JPS, 1988.

liberative transformation. I believe that this transformation is a conversion process that, in Spanish is called, "el Camino" (the Way). That is the exemplary motif.[31]

Lets not forget that GOD renewed Job: "The LORD restored Job's fortunes when he prayed on behalf of his friends, and the LORD gave Job twice what he had before" (Job 42:10, TANAKH).

In summary, the question on Job as an example of the righteous, blameless, pious person and the preferential love of GOD for the suffering poor (liberation theology) represents a contradiction. GOD praised Job before becoming poor. Yet, Gutiérrez and others' examination of the problem on how to talk about GOD in the midst of our suffering, offers some clues to reformulate the question.

From an epistemological framework we have asked: Was the poet-writer employing a rational epistemology where the theory, the idea, the divine (GOD's words in Job 1:8), comes first and the praxis later (primacy of the theory)? Or Was Job's praxis of sharing the suffering of the poor (Job 29:12-17) the foundation of the author's understanding of a communal knowledge of a relationship between praxis (the suffering of the poor, the oppressed, the innocent) and the theory (ideas about GOD)?

I prefer to think that the experience of a communal suffering of the poet-writer originated the contradiction. The creation of the poem was an exegesis on knowing and talking about GOD. After all, there are many voices heard in the Book of Job. Only one could have been authentic, faithful, legitimate, right: that is the voice of the poor, the innocent, the suffering. In this respect Gutiérrez brings light to our common reflection:

> *Job signals a path through his vehement protest, his discovery of the concrete commitment with the poor and with all of those that suffer unjustly, his encounter with GOD, and through his recognition of the gratuity of GOD's project over human history.*[32]

31.And I understand that the implications of this statement are clear: we need to teach as Christ taught; we need to speak as Christ spoke; we have to live the life He won for us; we have to live a new life. The Church has to transform to that model. We ALL have to learn this way, this "Camino". There is no alternative for a Christian. There are many options, but only one way to the Creator: Christ. None of the above can be done without the GRACE of GOD. Christians have the responsibility of giving example of a life dedicated to service. Hispanics need models <u>within</u> their communities. We need to perceive that this new life is possible within the <u>Barrio</u>. We need to know that Christianity is not a matter of rich structures and temples, that Christianity is a matter of helping our neighbor; that person who is close to me. We need to learn from Job.

32.Gutiérrez, *Hablar de Dios...*, pp. 184.

Resumen

A partir del trabajo de Gustavo Gutiérrez sobre Job, el autor trata de descubir en qué modo y bajo qué condiciones el sufrimiento de Job puede servir de modelo al sufrimiento de nuestro pueblo --en particular de nuestro pueblo pobre. Después de todo, antes de sus momentos de dolor Job no era pobre, sino todo lo contrario. Lo que es más, su sufrimiento no es el resultado de una opresión o explotación sistemática por parte de otros o de las estructuras sociales. Por tanto, tomar a Job como modelo para el sufrimiento de los pobres parece injustificado. Pero no es así si tomamos a Job, no como explicación del sufrimiento inmerecido, sino como ejemplo de las contradicciones que el sufrimiento mismo implica, y del modo en que podemos responder ante él. El autor del presente artículo concluye que el poeta que escribió la historia de Job estaba expresando, no sencillamente el sufrimiento de un individuo rico, sino el de toda una comunidad oprimida que se preguntaba acerca de la razón y el sentido de su sufrimiento u buscaba responder a él en fidelidad.

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Jesus Weeps: Global Encounters on Our Doorstep. Harold J. Recinos. Nashville: Abingdon, 1992. 142 pp.

Peggy Ann Way

In *Jesus Weeps: Global Encounters on Our Doorstep*, Pastor/Professor Recinos issues an invitation to local churches to refocus their understanding of mission by immersing themselves in alternate cultural contexts.

The *context* of immersion is the city --"God's Sacred Place"-- intended to be a mission of "city building [which] implies a gathering of diverse people in a concentrated geographical area organized into a new life style." *Biblically*, the intended new life together is based on a system of justice and equality, where the church "lives out the terms of its covenant with God and humanity...aimed at the structural transformation of society in the direction of the reign of God by globalizing its concern for justice in the city." Recinos' urban theology seeks the embodiment of God's created order by "discerning the root causes of human oppression and acting to remove them." For it is within and for the laundromats for junkies, the shooting galleries of the blocks, the cultures of the crack houses, that *Jesus Weeps*.

The *Author's own experiences* as a Latino growing up in a New York barrio root the text in a particular pilgrimage of faith. Recinos --as a former junky, shooting dope-- found "God present in the street experience of utter abandonment. God incarnate in Jesus was in my very flesh as a homeless child who searched for food in restaurant garbage cans, shelter in abandoned tenements, and who wore the same clothes for months at a time."

Harold J. Recinos' pilgrimage of suffering and hope finds him now as Assistant Professor of Ministry and Parish Development/Director of Student Pastor Track at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. An ordained United Methodist pastor, he has served at Church of All Nations-Spanish on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Through and in the midst of all of his experiences --including graduate study in the Department of Anthropology at American University in Washington, D.C.-- his faith deepened and his "commitment to the struggle of the city's underside grew stronger." Now, through this text, he shares the personal and intellectual struggles and commitments in a constructive invitation to local churches that seeks to connect the "heart of the city's Latino barrios, black ghettos, and [other] marginal places," with the conception of globalization, the ethical imperatives of the Gospel, and a method of immersion and dialogue based upon ethnographic study and the discipline of cultural anthropology. This method, the primary praxis contribution of the text, is named "pastoral anthropology."

Globalization. I remind you of the subtitle of the book: Global Encounters on Our Doorstep. Recinos' argument is clear and, to me, persuasive. I choose to quote him at some length.

Globalization has been a movement issuing forth from the compassionate ethics of a predominantly white middle class. The movement takes seriously the justice requirements of the gospel. This project in faith ethics has placed North American Christians in solidarity with the justice and human rights struggles of the Third World poor. The importance of that kind of identification can never be overemphasized; however, globalization has failed to make connections with the poor of first world society who are overwhelmingly rooted in the inner cities of the nation. The concern for transformation has for the most part not moved middle-class Christians to identification with the vision of a renewed society held by Latinos, blacks, Asians, Arabs, Native americans, and poor whites.
...Encountering God in the existential reality of the poor and oppressed overseas certainly has profound consequences for any Christian. I was most taken by the apparent blindness to the possibility of that encounter at home.

When this perspective is incorporated, the ethical imperative for the predominantly white middle class church is clear. Thru immersion experiences, globalization perspectives are embodied in the "global meeting ground of the city block," or the "global island of Manhattan." This allows the church to discern God's presence in the contrast of cultural experience, and to pay attention to cultural realities which insist upon "critical reflection on the gospel in the light of human diversity." Thus globalization is the process that makes the Word flesh in the reality of other human beings. The Gospel imperative is to transform social relations in history --in the existing cities-- for only there and then can the intended city be called into existence. Thus the prior understanding of Christian mission is turned on end. And while Recinos speaks as a Latino, his own immersion experiences in other cultures have filled him with the reality of the possibility of transformation and hope.

The Jewish holocaust ends the sentiment of Christian triumphalism. Moreover, Native American Christians teach the church to develop a pro-creation theology; black humanity teaches white Christians to appropriate God in nonracist ways, women point to the importance of developing a nonsexist concept of God and theological language; Latinos promote a non classist seizure of the faith tradition; womanists make central the categories of race and ethnicity in their ethic of struggle; and Arab humanity is affiliated with both Christianity and Islam holding communitarian values as an ultimate concern. Globalization as contextualized Christian experience in the multicultural, multiracial, and class-diverse context of the city gives the church a new compass for understanding human diversity in history.

To this situation, then, Recinos brings his training in the *discipline of anthropology*. Utilizing a form of *ethnographic research*, white Christianity must

listen to the "reconstructed God-talk of oppressed humanity," and learn to reread Scriptures as the "subversive memory of oppressed humanity." Toward this end, the author offers a *method of pastoral anthropology and local immersion* where, in stages, a local church does cultural research, guided immersion in a particular community, and, in the process, *experiences transformation*. Transformation in the parish will not come from merely talking about God's concern for justice in human community; instead, any theology of justice must make concrete reference to the struggle of specific sociocultural groups engaged in the process of overcoming conditions of injustice and oppression."

Pastor Recinos intersects the text of urban/cultural analysis with his own poetry, which states his vision as powerfully as his more formal analyses. Deeply influenced by Latin American theologies of liberation, his primary contribution is his method of *pastoral anthropology* which seeks to guide a local church as it undertakes its study and immersion processes of standing within an alternate culture and being itself transformed toward "the rediscovery of humanity as an agent of history" and its own sense of "agency in history affirming values based on solidarity, commitment, service, and community."

How might this resource be used? Pastor Recinos' text could be an excellent study guide for adult education about globalization, urban dynamics, cultural diversity, and explicating the vision of the "New City" intended in the Reign of God. I am less sanguine that its praxis contribution (the movement of the style of ethnographic analysis presented as pastoral anthropology and the immersion experience) will actually meet his desired goals of transformation.

My *First Criticism* is, I think, unintended in the text. For Pastor Recinos wishes to offer more than an excellent study guide for the education of the white dominant church. Yet within my own praxis concerns, his approach does not build local leadership, which is my understanding of the intent of liberation theologies; it uses occasionally unfortunate language, such as referring to "local informants" and "subject communities;" and does not consider the frequently very radical pluralisms of class, politics, and perspective that exist within every cultural community. Recinos' statement that "Latinos present a nonclassist seizure of the faith tradition" is problematic. And certainly the African American church is struggling with its own intraclass perspectives among the underclass, emerging middle class, and "silk stocking" constituencies. This neglect of pluralism and diversity among the oppressed seems to me to be naive and to undermine the historical reality of this method.

My *Second Criticism* is rooted in an alternative understanding of how best to prepare for inter-cultural or inter-religious dialogue. It is unlikely that a white "listening group" can begin to discuss the role that "ritual (symbolic dramatizations of ultimate reality) play in encouraging or discouraging local community identity" unless it has first practiced this in relation to its own ritual identity. How is the "outside community" to assess how "theological and cultural symbols dominate (an alternate culture's) church space" without first looking at their own? How many

white churches have analyzed their bulletin boards or seen how their "congregational demographic reality (is) related to issues of identity and the social structure of the wider community?"

In other words, in my judgement Recinos has not succeeded in overcoming that traditional anthropological fallacy of studying an alternate group without having first looked at itself. This seriously limits the "seeing" of the "other" that the author so values, and can render the "other" utterly different because the common dynamics have not been named. Thus were I to use the praxis contribution of this text in the many mostly white churches with which I am familiar, I would have them subject themselves to the "discovery strategies" which Recinos presents most competently as a prior exercise into what culture is and how it is expressed in diverse and unnoticed ways. We have learned from the ecumenical movement that diversity is more easily and profoundly celebrated by those who are aware of their own histories and meaning systems. Without that, the "other" remains just that, or is perceived as such a threat to one's own values that the difficult tasks of partnering forth God's intended "New City" remains but a vision, not the historical reality that Recinos --and I-- intend.

Desde el reverso: Materiales para la historia de la iglesia. Justo L. González, Daniel Rodríguez Díaz, Eliseo Pérez Alvarez. México: Publicaciones El Faro, APHILA 1993

Carmelo E. Alvarez

El V Centenario de la Conquista y colonización de Latinoamérica y el Caribe ha provocado las más variadas reacciones y controversias. Surge, así, una literatura apologética y defensiva y otras veces cuestionadora y crítica, sobre tan determinante hecho histórico.

El libro que ponen en nuestras manos El Faro y APHILA es mucho más que una crítica y cuestionamiento, sin ser una apología. Es una reflexión histórico-teológica que asume estos 500 años de crisis, para intentar avanzar en la búsqueda de nuestra propia historia. Este intento de por sí es ya un valioso aporte. Los cuatro artículos --diversos en su estilo y enfoque, pero entrecruzados por una misma preocupación: el sentido histórico de nuestra misión como creyentes-- nos ponen a pensar y a examinar críticamente la presencia cristiana y su cuota de responsabilidad en toda esta historia de opresión y esperanza. Es ahí donde "el reverso de la historia" (frase acuñada ya por Gustavo Gutiérrez) nos ofrece la oportunidad de ubicarnos desde la resistencia, la afirmación y el desafío misional que nos corresponde asumir. Debe haber una visión de la esperanza que los saque de una "cultura oprimida" (Jean Casimir) y los acerque a una "cultura de vida" (Helio Galardo). La carga de ese "destino manifiesto" nos debe llevar a reflexionar sobre nuestra "herencia y destino" para lanzarnos a escribir la "historia de la

misión" con todos sus elementos críticos y buscar nuestra misión en la historia, a partir de una evangelización contextual y liberadora.

Los tres colegas que aquí escriben --a quienes hemos conocido en distintas etapas de nuestro peregrinar académico y misionero-- nos han hecho una contribución positiva al provocarnos a repensar nuestra historia. Cada artículo cumple una función distinta en ese proceso de repensar y asumir.

Nos dejan una sensación de perplejidad e indignación ante hechos tan evidentemente opresivos, pero nos recalcan la necesidad de ir "en pos de nuestra propia historia" (como escribiera nuestro maestro, Justo L. González, en otro lugar).

Los dos artículos del Dr. Justo L. González tienen propósitos distintos y están bien colocados en el libro. Creo que la invitación inicial a ver críticamente la enseñanza de la historia (tan maltratada y negada en nuestros seminarios latinoamericanos y caribeños) es un aporte necesario. El Dr. González nos invita una vez más a ver la universalidad de nuestra fe y la particularidad de nuestra identidad y cultura, en una relación dinámica y dialéctica a partir de nuestra "confesión evangélica" (pp. 140-141). Así se entiende el sentido de la Misión.

El artículo del Dr. Daniel Rodríguez trata sobre una "evangelización" que todavía no logra ser plenamente buena nueva (particularmente en las iglesias evangélicas) y lucha por afirmarse desde ese "reverso de la historia", como verdadero agente de evangelización.

El Pbo. Eliseo Pérez asume su historia como mexicano y evangélico, tratando de absorber los tragos amargos de "una herencia de luces y sombras" (pp. 137-139) que marca y desafía.

El libro es un valioso y bienvenido aporte a esos "materiales para la historia de la Iglesia" que iniciara CEHILA dos décadas atrás. Por esa razón recomendamos el libro para cursos de historia de la Iglesia y para los de América Latina y el Caribe. Yo recomendaría los dos artículos del Dr. Justo L. González como introductorio a cualquier curso (el primero) y como conclusión al mismo curso, el último. Los trabajos del Dr. Daniel Rodríguez y Pbo. Eliseo Pérez los colocaría como estudios de casos dentro de un curso sobre historia del protestantismo en América Latina y el Caribe. ¡Prometo incluír todos estos artículos la próxima vez que me corresponda enseñarlo!

Gracias a estos buenos amigos por su excelente contribución.